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## LANGUAGE AS BEHAVIOR

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THIS IS a study of the psychological bases of language as a mode of behavior. While I realize that, under normal circumstances, language is a social, a sociological activity, I have limited myself, so far as possible, to the individual, to what a single person does when he employs language.

My thinking on this subject was started a good many years ago by a statement in one of Emerson's Essays: "Words are a kind of action, and action a kind of word." Of late years this somewhat mystical, oracular utterance of Emerson's has been clarified and expanded by the Behaviorists, by the scientific sociologists, and in general by the pragmatic and realistic philosophers of our day.

But I am not interested primarily in the speculative aspects of the matter. I am chiefly concerned with the manner in which language is taught in the schools. It would seem that, in general, language is not thought of by teachers as an activity, as a series of acts and habits, as a mode of behavior similar to such other modes of activity as, for example, walking, playing baseball, swimming, or dancing. Language learning and language using seem to be set apart from the learning and using of other activities and types of conduct, to be, for some reason, a mysterious and esoteric art, not in the same category as the other acts of one's life. Insofar as teachers have a conscious

conception and purpose in teaching language, they seem to look upon it as a mode of thinking, a sort of "inner behavior." Upon several occasions, I have obtained from teachers, statements of the image which comes first to their minds when they hear the phrase, "a person using language"; frequently the image is that of a person sitting at a desk, writing. In general, the emphasis in teaching language is placed upon clearness and accuracy, that is upon those qualities of language that seem to relate most closely to thinking.

Now, if language is primarily a mode of action, insofar as it is a mode of action, the philosophy underlying the teaching of language must be vastly different from that which would underlie it if language is a thought process, an "inner action." It is in this practical problem that I am most deeply concerned. I want to determine what are the psychological bases of language, in order that, in the light of these bases, I may be able to criticize and evaluate the prevailing methods of teaching language (I mean, of course, the "mother tongue"), to determine whether they should concern themselves chiefly with the "action" or with the "thought" processes.

### *What is Language?*

Language (by which is meant both speaking and writing) consists, under the usual cir-

cumstances of life, of an extremely complicated and intricate set of activities. Since it is normally carried on within a group of persons, there is a continual action and reaction, a give and take, a shifting succession of stimuli and responses. It is carried on in many different social situations, by many procedures, is prompted by a variety of motives, aims at a variety of objectives. Moreover, language as it is used by adults, is a habit, pretty firmly fixed: it has been learned, acquired; it conforms to transmitted, conventional patterns and regulations.

Obviously, therefore, if we are to get down to the essential, basal facts of language learning and language using, we must find some means to simplify this intricate, varied, already habitual set of activities. There is but one available, reliable means of securing this information: by study of infants and children. (The efforts of the philosophers and philologists to determine how in prehistoric time language originated must, in the very nature of the case, be largely speculative, while the endeavor to arrive at the original, essential nature of language by study of simple savage speech has proved hopeless, for the reason that no primitive speech has been discovered which is not already intricate and highly developed. Data from these two sources can be utilized only as supplemental and corroborative.)

I shall attempt, therefore, to reduce the extreme complexity of language to simplicity by tracing the process by which an infant (etymologically, an "infant" is one who is "unable to talk") learns his "native language," his "mother tongue." And to simplify the matter still further, I will assume that we are observing a normal, average child, who faithfully represents infancy: let us call him John Homo. Putting out of our minds all notions as to the nature and function of language in adult life, let us concentrate on John Homo's language learning and language using.

### *Physical Equipment*

First of all, every normal baby (our John Homo) has at birth an elaborate and intricate

vocal apparatus, together with an adequate nerve and muscle equipment. Indeed, it would appear according to Watson<sup>1</sup> that "The anatomy of the neck and upper thorax regions is the most complicated of the whole body"; and it is probable that the total vocal equipment of a human infant is more complete and exquisitely adapted, both as to organs, parts, physical devices, and the like and also as to the complexity of nerve and muscle structure than the vocal equipment of the young of any other animal. He has, moreover, certain areas in the cortex of the brain definitely set apart for the sensory and motor activities involved in speech and other areas given over to the correlative associational processes. Probably the human infant is equipped with an organism capable of being manipulated to produce more sounds, a greater variety of modifications of sounds, more flexibility and refinement, a greater range of pitch, intensity, quality, and the like than the infant of any other creature.

I shall not describe this vocal equipment, as full details can be found in many books.<sup>2</sup> But certain considerations bearing on our problem need to be made at this point.

In the first place, the human animal has probably<sup>3</sup> evolved the flexible, delicately adjusted vocal apparatus he possesses at present; in the long course of prehistoric history, he has made, he has earned his vocal mechanism—function or need preceding organism.

In the second place, man's vocal apparatus consists largely (perhaps only) of parts, units, organs originally employed for purposes other than speech.<sup>4</sup> Lungs, throat, tongue, teeth, lips, all perform vital non-vocal activities. Breathing, eating, fighting (which last, in the case of early man, must have involved the teeth for biting and tearing)—

<sup>1</sup>PSYCHOLOGY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF A BEHAVIORIST. Phila., 1919: p. 334.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example: Watson, op. cit. pp. 331, ff., and Pillsbury and Meader THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE, New York, 1928: chap. 3.

<sup>3</sup>I say "probably" because there is no proof except that of analogy and the apparent impossibility that prehistoric man, as pictured in restorations based on the early skulls, could have possessed the elaborate equipment present-day man has.

<sup>4</sup>It may be that the vocal cords have had no other function than those relating to speech.

these activities must have preceded speech, must be biologically older.

It is interesting to speculate as to the reasons why, far back in the Piltown days, man learned to utilize vocal organs (as yet probably crude and rudimentary) as the chief instrument in language. Why did not some other part of the body develop as the specialized organs for language; why, for example, did not the hands take over the language function? It would seem that in the early days of *homo sapiens* the hands could have presented pretty strong arguments for being "chosen" as the most convenient implement for expression and communication. There were two of them; they were perhaps more flexible, more "manipulatable" than the Piltown "vocal" organs; probably, through pointing-out activities, gestures, and the like, they "got a start" over all rivals; and certainly they must have participated energetically in the total-body responses. But so also did the grunts, groans, snarls, cries, ejaculations, and yells made (incidentally, as it were) by the breathing-and-eating apparatus. Moreover, sounds could be heard in the darkness of night or a dark forest, whereas hand-language could not. Besides, the hands had their *hands full*; and it was often at the very moment when the hands were most busily employed and therefore least available for language activities, that language was most needed. On the other *hand*, the breathing-eating mechanism was nearly always free for language functions.<sup>5</sup>

For such reasons man's lung-throat, mouth-teeth-tongue organism evolved into the main instrument for language. The hands meantime went through their process of development, most important of which was the attaining of the opposable thumb. And developed hands and developed vocal organs have been the chief means by which man drew himself up from the brute, and they remain to this day his most versatile and characteristic means of action.

### *Language "Instincts"*

So our infant, John Homo, has, as an integral part of his biological inheritance, an adequate vocal equipment, a box of useful vocal tools. But he has also inner urges, strong impulses, instinctive drives to manipulate this equipment, to handle these tools. I do not know what prompts these impulses, what causes these urges. Perhaps it is biochemical changes, glandular activities. But whatever it is, it is precisely the same instinctive force that causes John to manipulate his other muscles; to squirm, twitch, stretch, move hands and feet, fingers and toes. In general, the presence of an organ betokens a concomitant function, an accompanying desire and need to use that organ (though, sometimes, as in the case of the vermiform appendix, the organ has lost its usefulness and has not yet been sloughed off, and though generally the desire comes only with full maturation of the organ.)

### *The Beginnings of Speech*

John's first vocal utterance is a cry. But this seems to be purely physical, caused by the filling of the lungs with air. Not long after his first forced cry, John begins, of his own accord, to utter other cries, a variety of them, and other sounds as well: clucks, gurgles, laughs—building up a repertoire of vocal utterances. I say "of his own accord," but of course there is no deliberate volition: it is altogether a matter of reflexes. Stimuli from within and from without his body, light, heat, coldness, wetness, sounds, kinaesthetic stimuli, perhaps glandular activities, make their impressions on John's receptors. Here (again by a process which science has not yet clearly explained) the physical energy released by the stimuli-producing agency is transformed into nervous energy which is transmitted over the sensory nerves to a nerve center. From this center the nerve energy is "redirected" back over the motor nerves to the vocal organism—and John cries, or coos.

And at the same time John wiggles or wriggles: his entire reacting organism is set in

<sup>5</sup>See Judd, *PSYCHOLOGY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION*, New York, 1927: pp. 195-196.

motion. Edgar Allen Poe, in discussing works of art, speaks of "totality of impression"; here it is a matter of "totality of expression"—John, like Old Dog Rover in the nursery rhyme, "cries all over." The vocal mechanism is but a part of John's behavior equipment; it responds along with the complete equipment. I cannot follow up the implications of this statement. Suffice it here to say that speech behavior, vocal conduct in infancy is obviously like any other behavior: it is but one item in the total reaction. Moreover, it remains for some years closely bound up with other bodily reactions: speech is rarely used by itself.<sup>6</sup>

But let us not impute to John any motive or purpose in his cooing or crying: it is truly an instinctive act, not reflective but reflexive. A little boy of my acquaintance had done something "bad." "What did you do that for?" asked his mother. "But I didn't do it *for*," replied the boy: "I just did it." So with John: a stimulus attacks him, from somewhere, from his "innerness" or his "outerness" (and as yet he can't distinguish between them) and straightway he responds through the channels Nature has opened up for him.

This process has been described at some length (though, nevertheless, with the omission of much detail) because it is basal to my problem. The baby has a vocal apparatus and he has also a nerve-muscle equipment (sensory nerves, nerve centers, motor nerves) which gives him an urge and a power to manipulate this apparatus and produce a variety of vocal effects. It is true behavior-mechanism, motor-organism, of precisely the same nature as that which leads him to look fixedly at an object, to blink his eyes, to "wrassle" with his father's finger, to squirm or roll over: instinctive, intrinsic, natural, one of the baby's ways of "expressing himself." Expressing himself to whom? To anybody, to nobody: his is "speaking" to the circumnambient ether. Expressing himself for what

purpose? For no conscious purpose: he is not doing it *for*. In short, language in its early stages is instinctive, not learned; it is physical, not psychical; purposeless, not purposeful; individual, not social; it is true expression, not communication. And it is, above all, activity, behavior, conduct.

John's vocal ability—and agility—develops. It develops for two reasons. In the first place, his vocal organs are maturing. In the second place, he is constantly manipulating the organs, putting them "through their paces," trying them out—not deliberately, of course: it is a matter of chance, not choice; of accident, not intention; of vague, aimless fumbling. Precisely the same process is going on in John's other muscular activities: in suckling, in the various contortions of his face, in the twistings of arms and legs. John moves anything "that is loose," so to speak. And each time the stimulus-response circuit is completed, new bonds are formed: John's repertoire of vocal acts is enlarged.

This is the first period of language-learning. It is a genuine ego-stage, the individualistic era of John's life. He is "retired within himself": he is a Crusoe on his island, a Thoreau at Walden Pond. What takes place within him is important; nothing else matters. Of course, when a nipple is put to his mouth by some mysterious but benign nourisher, he sucks—if he is in the mood; when a glaring light appears, somewhere in the vast "otherness" that surrounds him, he blinks and yells. But in all probability, he doesn't detect any connection between his movements, vocal or otherwise, and what has caused them or what results from them.

### *The Second Stage*

The second stage in John's progress toward speechhood begins when he first describes (no doubt dimly and vaguely) a relationship between cause and effect. He notices that, when wanting his bottle, he whimpers, the bottle appears; and after a time and doubtless after many false leads and abortive trials, a bond is formed between "food-whimper" and

<sup>6</sup>See, for a full discussion of this: Johnson, *CHILDREN IN THE NURSERY SCHOOL*. New York, 1928: Part II, Section 3, "Language and Rhythm."



"bottle-appearance." He notices that when, in his ceaseless experiments with his articulatory apparatus, he accidentally hits upon "papa" or "mama," he is picked up and hugged and "made over"—and, having erogenous zones, he likes that, likes it so much that if he can and when he can, he makes that sound again.

A new element has entered. Heretofore the stimulus (from within or without John's body) has caused a response from the vocal mechanism; now that response has itself become the stimulus (i.e. the movements of John's vocal organism) which cause a new response—this time from *without*, from entirely external regions. This is now the process: first, John has a desire; second, he makes it known through his vocal mechanism; and third he gets what he wishes. He has learned what language is for: it is a means of making known one's ideas and getting the appropriate reaction or "come-back"—that is precisely what it is, a "come-back."

Here again we must be cautious lest we

impute too much deliberate intent to John's vocal attempts. The truth would seem to be that for some time John's vocalizations are quite random and reflex. Urged by ill-defined impulses, he tries a lot of speech "stunts," opens his whole bag of tricks, pulls out all the stops on his *pipe-organ* (pun not intentional: it just happened, like John's chance movements.) Suddenly one of these efforts brings the result: John's wish is granted. And the next time John has that desire, he probably has to fumble with fewer random movements: he achieves his results sooner, precisely like the rat in the maze. Finally the stimulus leads, immediately and without deviation, to the vocal movements that have proved to be successful: nerves and muscles, the kinaesthetic sensations involved in speech and probably the auditory sensations that John gets from the sound of his own voice—all cooperate to make that specific stimulus-response activity a definite, permanent part of John's behavior.

(To be continued)

Some say that ever, 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:  
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;  
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

—*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 2

# The Christmas Time

## A Bibliography

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*God rest you merry, gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay,  
For Jesus Christ our Saviour  
Was born upon this day.*  
OLD CAROL

### *The Bible Narrative*

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|---|--|
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<sup>1</sup>Figures after the title indicate grades in which stories are suitable.

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# A New Attitude Toward Speech

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SOMEONE is always trying to tell Americans what they need. We Americans are a sort of jolly, good-natured folk, very well fed, fairly well clothed, comfortably sheltered, and able to transport ourselves about the world in more and better conveyances than most Europeans. We accept almost any kind of advice, smile, say "Thank you" and even try out some of it. One adviser suggests that Americans need more of three *C's*, that is, *contemplation*, *correspondence*, and *conversation*; a second has added another *C* to these three and says that we need more *courtesy*; a third suggests that we need more walking, reading, and thinking; a fourth would have us learn to relax, especially when we listen, when we wait, and when we ride.

Now all these bits of instruction and advice are taken by most Americans with good grace, common sense, and a delightful sense of humor. Until recently, however, let someone start giving an American any suggestion, advice, or criticism concerning his speech, and the first thing that he lost was his sense of humor; the next to disappear was his temper. Suggesting any change in his speech was like suggesting a change in his religion or his politics, both of which were often bound up with sacred memories of family life.

It is very difficult for America to grow up. Once a pioneer people does not mean always a pioneer people. A rough exterior, overalls, old clothes, do not mean a rough nature. Exquisite grooming and beautiful clothes, on the other hand, do not always mean a beautiful or sensitive spirit. The fact remains that when America was a pioneer land, she often associated rough clothes and blunt speech with sincerity and earnest purpose. She was skeptical of fine clothes and fine speech as

somehow representing affectation and insincerity. At least in America's thinking, democracy and overalls went together. Culturally speaking, however, America is growing up. Go down into the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee or to Berea, Kentucky, and you will see some of the finest examples of the weaving art of America. Go to the Navajo Indians and you will find an unsurpassed beauty in their workmanship. Go to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt's furniture factory at Hyde Park, New York, and you will find both sincerity and beauty in the reproductions of our early American furniture. If culture, to be genuine, must spring from the lives of the people themselves, surely America has a culture all her own. We are beginning to see the beauty in our native industries, in our Indian and Negro music and folklore, and in our recessional architecture. Our pioneer days are swiftly passing. In one respect, however, we are just about as pioneer as ever, and that is in our attitude toward our speech.

What we need in America today is a new attitude toward our language; a belief that our mother tongue is a rich and ancient heritage, that it is as beautiful a language as has ever been spoken by civilized man, and that to it we owe our loyalty, our respect, and our reverence. If this be patriotism, we are not afraid of the word. Furthermore, Americans need to be taught that we have an American speech which is just as beautiful as British speech; a speech which will pass muster in any international court where cultured English-speaking people gather.

But who can blame Americans for failing to have this high vision of their American speech, when instead of the beauty which comes from speaking in the mouth, we hear

the nasal twang, the back-throat guttural sounds, the tired and nervous "quack" in the back of the throat, and the loud, raucous sounds which indicate to Europeans that the tourist season has started? Some doubt exists in the minds of many Americans as to whether or not the rest of America ever hears any of these sounds. In America one may receive the highest degrees in our universities and colleges and still speak with a nasal twang. One can say "woik" instead of "work," "idear" for "idea," flat *a* in "can't," "yelluh" for "yellow," "father-r-r" for "father," "taown" for "town," but diplomas or degrees will never be withheld for these reasons. Perhaps they shouldn't be, but in a country where everyone has a chance at a college education, such a drastic measure would work speech miracles in a single year. It is very difficult for Americans to hear speech. There is, however, a great deal of speech in America that is agreeable, effective, pleasing, and good. Ideas, interesting thoughts, and the meat of the matter, will always be more important than a rounded *o*, or a beautiful Italian *a*, but now that America has proven to the world that she is full of ideas, that she often gives them forth in beautiful literature, would it not be well to prove to the world that we also have a beautiful speech that is all our own?

Where and at what point shall we start? Let us start with the attitude toward speech in the average American community. If there is an attitude at all, it is likely to be a negative one. While a visitor from the outside may come into the community and speak a very different speech from that of the natives of that community, it is not well for those who intend to live there to adopt this different speech. If the community uses flat *a*'s and inverts its *r*'s, then the line of least resistance, the *mores* of the community, is to continue flat *a* and inverted *r*. The tendency is to ridicule any kind of speech that is new or different, especially if it seems affected or British to the natives. The idea that good speech should not betray the geography of

the speaker is a new one, and does not coincide with the old theory of state's rights. It has always been just as well to say "cyar" for "car" in Virginia, "Ohiuh" for "Ohio" in that state, "mini min" for "many men" in Texas, and "raound" for "round" in Kentucky.

In a large number of these communities, if you discuss better speech with parents or teachers, they jump to the conclusion that you are talking about better grammar. If you tell them that it is possible to speak grammatically and not speak well, that it is possible to speak correctly and not speak well, you arouse their curiosity, and you are often asked to explain what you mean by good speech. It would be excellent if we could assume good grammar in America and, as a matter of fact, we are doing such a good job in our public schools that the time will come when public opinion will be so strong for good grammar that one will be considered an uneducated person if he does not obey its simplest rules, such as no "ain'ts" and no "I seen's." But to assume that good grammar and correct verb forms have much to do with a loosened jaw, and open throat, a resonant quality, is simply assuming something that is not true. In discussing politeness, an English headmaster was once asked how he was able to secure such universal politeness among the children in his school. His answer was that in England "politeness was assumed." The American visitor asked him this question, "Suppose you assume it, and do not get it. What then?" He replied, "Oh, but you see, in England public opinion is *for* politeness." The time will come in this America of ours, when public opinion will favor beautiful American speech so strongly that we shall assume its existence in all communities in which the parents are anxious to give their children the best education possible.

Would it not be possible for the people in these American communities to substitute a bilingual for their present uni-lingual attitude toward the English language? This has been done in England with such far-reaching consequences that the National Course of



Study states that it is necessary for almost every child to become bilingual in English. This means that for some time the child will have literally two English languages, one his native speech and the other his "received" or acquired speech. If his native speech is that of a Yorkshire or Lancashire dialect, with *r*'s that are rolled in the back of the throat, and with two *o*'s for one when he says "coom" for "come," or if he lisps or stutters, it is assured that this native speech must gradually be supplemented by another speech of an entirely different kind. It may be as difficult for a child to acquire this new speech as it is for him to acquire the French language, but by the time he enters a secondary school, he must be just as proficient in his new English speech as if he had spent the same time learning French.

What stands in the way of the American acceptance of just such a bilingual attitude as this? First of all, there is that old fear of aping British speech, and the only answer to this is that the only kind of American speech which we wish to make popular, is the kind of speech which we have already accepted on the American stage as spoken by Walter Hampden, Edith Wynne Matthison, Otis Skinner, Julia Marlowe, and others. We have accepted this because we have already given these people medals for using it. We have given two medals for this accepted American speech over the radio, so we must consider Mr. Cross and Mr. Bock worthy representatives of a speech that our children would do well to imitate. We are rapidly making victrola records of the speech of our best American speakers. Surely we can become bilingual, we can rid ourselves of ugly speech, we can retain our quaint expressions without becoming British.

But perhaps there is a greater obstacle to be overcome in accepting this bilingual attitude in America than this fear of imitating the British. It is the fact, previously noted, that America, in many ways, is still a pioneer country. In the transition from native to acquired speech, the person who is making the

transition is going to suffer. He will be accused of being affected, "high-hat," snobbish, "high-brow," or superior. Recently a girl returned to her home after one year at Smith College. Smith College has perhaps one of the finest departments of speech in this country, in which a serious attempt is made to give every student a pleasing, and if necessary, an acquired speech. This girl came to her home and decided to practice her new speech on her family. Although her mother was a college graduate, she was horrified at this attempt of her daughter to speak in any way which, as she said, was not natural. She forgot that for many people speaking naturally was about the worst thing they could do. The bilingual idea will have a long and hard road to travel before it has anything like the universal acceptance that it has in England. Nevertheless, it is one very definite answer to the question of where we shall start in our program of speech education.

Many forces are at work in America today to bring about the acceptance of this bilingual attitude. The little theatre movement in communities where the little theatre organization is willing to employ a speech teacher has assisted materially in changing the point of view of the community toward speech. In the July 1930 number of the *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Mr. Windsor P. Daggett has an interesting article called "The Art of Speech in Texas." He says "I found myself in the Little Theatre of Dallas. This diction of the actors was so delocalized that placing them geographically was mostly guesswork. In the best companies in New York it is often difficult to tell an American actor from an Englishman and so it was in Dallas. Inquiry after the play revealed that two members of the cast hailed from outside of Texas, a New Yorker and an Englishman. A stranger in the audience would have no cause to single out the Englishman as an importation. A detective might have discovered a New York 'city accent' in the 'firm' and 'first' of one speaker in contrast to any other, and occasionally he probably would notice the o-sound of

the juvenile, as suggesting Texas speech, firm lipped and sonorous. But occasional tags of this sort were entirely over-shadowed in the ensemble of a diction that came as near to standard as one is likely to hear except in the most carefully chosen companies on Broadway. There were no 'mini min' and no 'farmerly a former' pronunciations. In the doubtful words on the contrary, *ah* had the same preference it has in the pronunciation of Walter Hampden and Mrs. Fiske: *ah* in 'advantage, after, ask, bath, castle, chance, glasses, granted, pass, rather.'

"This is evidence in itself that actors of the Dallas Theatre cultivate the same consciousness of speech that professional actors cultivate until English without an accent and somewhat above the common level is as easy as anything. After six years of audience-actor education the diction in Dallas runs pretty smoothly. How this development has reacted as self-education on audience and actor is interesting. When the theatre was cutting its teeth, if a local boy stepped onto the stage on an opening night and said *ah* in 'can't' the audience laughed. But audience and actor have grown up since then. The boy expects to say *ah* in 'can't' long before he joins the company, perhaps says it at home now, the audience expects to hear it, and the reviewer has his pencil out if the standard is forgotten."

Another strong force for better speech may be found in the well-established speech departments in our institutions of higher learning. They are introducing gradually the study of the international phonetic alphabet. It is possible for a few well-taught courses in phonetics and diction to have as much influence on the speech of the students as all the courses in debating, argumentation, dramatics, story-telling, and public speaking combined. May the time soon come when the work of the voice and diction teacher will function in the courses in public speaking and

debating. At present, there seems to be scarcely any more transfer from a voice and diction course to a course in mathematics, than from a voice and diction course to a course in debating. It is due at present to the fact that Americans are less interested in beautiful speech than in mathematics or debating.

Here and there we find a few teachers who are becoming thoroughly aroused over the fact that so little is done with the speech of the child in the elementary school, aside from grammar, or from urging him to talk at almost any time about anything. When these teachers are more in number and when their voices are raised a little bit higher above the clamor, we shall begin to save ourselves much time and energy which the high school and college teachers now expend in overcoming the neglected speech of the child in the elementary school.

Other forces in American life are playing their part in this less pioneer attitude toward American speech. Inter-stimulation and inter-communication, as a result of the automobile and the radio, are helpful factors. The beautiful speech of Walter Damrosch as he tells the American children of musical masterpieces is bound to have great influence when we can once arouse American teachers to the fact that Walter Damrosch speaks a beautiful American speech. Children in our American schools who do not have the opportunity of hearing our great actors and actresses are sitting in auditoriums and listening to the victrola records of their speeches.

What is good speech in America? First of all, it is American speech; it is American speech that is pleasing, agreeable, and effective. It is spoken in the mouth rather than in the throat or the nose. Forces are at work today in our community life and in our schools which will make this type of American speech the popular and accepted kind in the not far distant future.

# The Teaching of Oral Reading

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IN THE teaching of reading we have used several types of procedures. At one time the common practice was to have oral reading in which each pupil had his turn in reading to a group, each member of which followed the reading from the same material in his hands. When the fallacy of this practice became apparent, many schools went to the opposite extreme and gave chiefly silent reading. At the present time we seem to be observing a better balanced program in teaching both phases of reading with a more adequate division of time.

Observations and experimentations seem to indicate quite clearly a distinction between these two phases of reading. This distinction is often apparent with some pupils during the latter part of the first grade when the ability to read develops to the degree that they are able to read much more rapidly silently than orally. Modern methods soon reduce lip readers, and increase the eye span so that the two phases of reading are distinctly different. In silent reading the eye span is greater, the pausation periods less than in oral reading. Silent reading is largely an individual matter in which the child merely gets the thought of the content read. In oral reading the eye span is less, and hence the rapidity less, as the reader is not only getting the thought but he is also transmitting this thought to others by means of the human voice. The former is an individual matter using mental abilities in securing the thought, while the latter is a socialized undertaking in which skill in speech habits is necessary.

Oral reading has several values which are so vital that it should be carefully taught in the schools. In the first place, oral reading is valuable in developing the right speech

habits. The human voice has such possibilities and is often so improperly used that a definite technique should be used in the school to assure its proper functioning. It is not a matter of not being able to talk, of not being able to communicate, but a matter of being able to use the voice in a clear, effective and pleasing manner. The demands of modern society are such that speech habits must be properly developed. The radio with its announcers who specialize in broadcasting may influence this tendency very appreciably. This is an important aim in the modern school. The efficient teaching of oral reading tends to a realization of this aim.

In the second place, oral reading is valuable in the development of the right social qualities. The modern school recognizes the importance of socializing the child. The socialized individual is very apt to be a happy person, and this quality may be of value in attaining success in school and in adult life. Effective oral reading is a valuable socializing activity.

Another value to be attained in the teaching of oral reading is that of developing the auditory sense. Many pupils are visual-minded, which is an asset in the learning process. The auditory sense, however, should also be developed. This can be done to a large extent by the audience type of oral reading. Possibly the extensive use of the radio will also tend to develop this ability. Still another value in oral reading is that of providing a means by which comprehension may be checked. This value is subject to some questioning, however, as we have more adequate checks upon comprehension. A fluent reader may not be able to think very deeply upon involved contents.



Audience reading may be said to be that phase of oral reading in which there is an interested audience securing the thought only by listening. It is doubtful if this type of oral reading can be secured adequately by the audience having the material before them to follow while the reading is being done. The non-audience type is that in which the pupil may have two means of securing the thought, by listening and by following the material at hand. The oral reading may be so poorly done that the pupils have but one means of securing the thought, that of following with the selection in their hands. This type is entirely eliminated by some who see no value in it whatsoever. Others use it occasionally as an aid to the poor oral reader whose chief difficulty is with words. The value of the non-audience type is so doubtful and the value of the audience phase is so apparent, the teacher would do well to employ the latter type most of the time in oral reading. Stone, in an extensive investigation, found that the non-audience type was being used almost exclusively. All teachers should recognize the value of the audience type of oral reading, and use it far more than the non-audience type.

While it is not always easy and possible to secure adequate audience situations,<sup>1</sup> the teacher, with the help and guidance of the principal and the supervisor, should plan this phase carefully. New, fresh, and interesting material always at hand constitutes the best means of securing audience situations. This is somewhat difficult, but libraries, personal books of the teacher and the pupils, newspapers and juvenile magazines, can be provided in many cases.

Another means of securing an audience situation is to make sure the reading is of such a nature and in such a manner that the audience wants to listen. The reading material must be studied intelligently, to determine how it may be used most effectively.

Some material is better suited for silent reading than for oral reading. The reading of the material must be such that the other pupils can be an audience. In most instances this requires some advance preparation; the value of sight reading is somewhat doubtful. Adults who read well will often want the opportunity of looking over material before being called upon to read it to others, and this may be more true of pupils.

The poor oral reader requires special technique to improve his reading. Several items should be kept in mind. It is doubtful if he will ever become a good oral reader unless he wants to read. This will often require special effort to arouse an interest in reading and a genuine desire to read to others. Continued drill without this desire to read is a disagreeable, tedious, and often an ineffective undertaking. The philosopher expressed this very well when he said, "To teach without interest is to pound upon cold iron." The poor oral reader is not likely to become a good reader by merely taking his "turn" with the class each day. Far more effective is the enthusiastic preparation of an interesting selection two or three times a month for reading to a listening audience. In the training school of the San Francisco State Teachers College, a boy in the fourth-grade, with less than first-grade reading ability, presented such a problem. He was given a book on airplanes, as that was his major interest. In less than a week he would read the entire book through. Its content was of third grade difficulty. The problem was then partially settled, as he was interested in a certain type of reading material and had gained some confidence in himself.

Contests in oral reading will often arouse interest and improve the reading. Such contests are described in the Gist-King book.<sup>2</sup> Oral reading, therefore, has so many values that special attention and thoughtful teaching techniques should be applied to it.

<sup>1</sup>Stone, C. R.—"Oral Reading in the Elementary School and its Supervision," *THIRD YEARBOOK*, Department of Elementary School Principals, N. E. A., 1201 Sixteenth Street N. W. Washington, D. C.

<sup>2</sup>Gist, Arthur S. and King, William A.—*THE TEACHING AND SUPERVISION OF READING*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927.



# Editorial

## SEASONAL SUGGESTIONS

ON THE engraved Christmas card, not even the signature has to be written by the sender. This represents one extreme in Christmas giving, in which the personal element is reduced to the lowest possible terms. Christmas is more than a convention of this kind. After all, Christmas is most replete with good will and good cheer when personal sympathy is made a part of the expression.

Why shouldn't the Christmas of 1930 be made the occasion for teaching school children the value of personal expression in Christmas messages? The idea has many ramifications, for the surest way to an understanding of this lesson is through the sympathies. Let the teacher once raise the question of persons who must spend a lonely Christmas, and children will, with great solicitude, find the addresses of patients in the hospital who must remain there through the holiday season. They will think, too, of any number of other places, such as old peoples' homes, and orphanages, where Christmas letters will be welcome.

The first week in December will be sufficient to gather these addresses. If real interest is aroused, another week will pass quickly in the time that can be given to writing, revising, re-writing, and putting into the letters the genuine good wishes that will surely well up once inquiry is made into the possible loneliness of other persons.

There are other forms of writing almost as well adapted to the Christmas composition as the letter. In schools where broken toys are being repaired, or new toys made for

Christmas giving, the children may write little stories to accompany the toys. In this way, the mended doll may go rejoicing at her recovery from a serious accident, and the teddy bear will be doubly welcome if he can tell a story of other Christmases.

In creative writing classes the children may express their Christmas sentiments in a number of ways. There will be the verses for Christmas cards—signed, let us hope, by the senders themselves; there will be the dramatization for the Christmas party to which children from another class are invited; there will be the reading aloud of little stories written by pupils. In cases where the play or the story prove exceptionally enjoyable, the class can incorporate it into an entertainment for the patients in the children's ward in some local hospital.

It is training in the ways of social expression and its encouragement at Christmas time that make Christmas the glamorous festival of tradition. It is lack of such training and encouragement that leads to the broadcasting of impersonal, unsigned greetings, the mad rush of shoppers, and the haste and fretfulness that take the heart and joy out of the Christmas season.

Children respond quickly to acts of sincerity and to situations marked by genuine good will. To have entered into undertakings of the sort suggested here, genuinely Christmas-like in friendly generosity, is truly educative. As John Dewey points out, such an experience contributes to growth which once begun in so satisfactory a way, is likely to continue.

## THE CHRISTMAS TIME

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**Make We Merry**

*Make we we mery bothe more and lasse  
For now ys the tyme of Crystymas,*

**Lett** no man cum into this hall,  
Grome, page, nor yet marshall,  
But that sum sport he bring withall;  
*For now ys the tyme of Crystymas!*

**Uff** that he saye he can not sing,  
Some oder sport then let him bring,  
That yt may please at thys festyng;  
*For now ys the tyme of Crystymas!*

**Uff** he say he can nowght do,  
Then for my love aske hym no mo,  
But to the stokkis then lett hym go;  
*For now ys the tyme of Crystymas!*

—Balliol MS; Commonplace Book of Richard Hill 1500-1535

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